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Consumer Perceptions of the Marketing Mix in Fast Fashion and Luxury Fashion

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Abstract: *The paper analyzes consumer perception (Generations Y and Z) of the marketing mix in fashion retail, comparing the strategies of fast fashion and luxury fashion brands. The study starts from the observation that both segments rely on the digital environment but use marketing levers for divergent purposes: promoting speed and accessibility versus consolidating exclusivity and status. The central objective of the research was to investigate the perceptions and preferences of young Romanian consumers towards the marketing strategies of the two types of brands. To this end, quantitative research was conducted using an online questionnaire, with 147 responses from Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z respondents. Statistical analyses focused on how elements such as price, product quality, visual content, and values conveyed influence purchasing decisions. The results confirmed that price perception is a determining factor in the choice of fast fashion brands, while luxury brands generate a significant impact, especially through physical evidence (packaging and ambiance) and visual storytelling. Although theoretically Generation Z was expected to be more receptive to fast fashion items, the data indicated a balanced openness to both types of marketing, highlighting a strong aspirational dimension of luxury brands. It was determined that the strongest lever for consumers to identify with the values of a luxury brand is repeated purchasing behavior, not just passive exposure on social media. These conclusions offer distinct strategic directions, emphasizing transparent financial communication for fast fashion and meticulous management of the tangible experience for luxury fashion.*

Keywords: fashion; fast fashion; luxury fashion; marketing mix.

Introduction

The contemporary fashion industry is undergoing continuous transformation, influenced by globalization, digitization, and the dynamics of consumer preferences, who are looking for both common, casual, inexpensive clothing items and innovative, attractive ones with different and even unique designs. Often, due to financial constraints imposed by the need to ensure their daily livelihood, consumers resort to purchasing relatively inexpensive clothes that are in step with social developments and reflect current fashion trends (Chen et al., 2025). The purchase of inexpensive clothing with interesting and attractive designs (Gibson et al., 2020) is sometimes the result of recommendations from friends, acquaintances, or various influencers whom they follow devotedly (Yan et al., 2022). The motivation for choosing inexpensive clothes may also be due to the fact that, in a relatively short time, consumers can purchase clothing items for different styles and/or seasons to wear in various socio-cultural contexts (at home, at work, when socializing with friends, at formal events, etc.) (Taylor et al., 2023) without any major headaches. Sometimes wearing these clothes is due to the need to belong to a certain group (Safdar et al., 2020) or for social acceptance (Etuk et al., 2022).

On the other hand, consumers are also looking for unique clothing items that allow them to differentiate themselves better or stand out among their peers, to gain social prestige and/or recognition from others (Yang et al., 2023), to have a special emotional experience, to be happy or proud, as recognition for a special achievement or for intense and sustained

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effort, to communicate their feelings, experiences, and values appropriately (Lindeman et al., 2023), but also due to the rarity or financial, time, or effort constraints (Patel et al., 2020) involved in purchasing certain clothing items.

Thus, consumers show great behavioral flexibility when shopping, looking for both mass market clothing items such as fast fashion clothes, purchased from stores that change their collections entirely or partially several times a year (Wang, 2022), such as Zara, H&M, Bershka, Stradivarius, Pull&Bear, C&A, Reserved, New Yorker, Pepco, Sinsay, etc., but also from luxury stores. Luxury fashion refers to high-quality clothing, accessories, and footwear made from superior materials and crafted with great attention to detail (Grębowiec and Pietrzak, 2023). The term "luxury" itself suggests exclusivity, high costs, and limited availability, which makes luxury fashion items highly desirable to that segment of the population that can afford them. Luxury fashion brands are known for their iconic designs, exceptional quality, and impeccable craftsmanship, which often become synonymous with the brand itself (Tam and Lung, 2024).

Of course, the strategy of retailers in the fast-fashion and luxury fashion sectors is very different in terms of image building and brand communication (Chen et al., 2023), market positioning (Dabija et al., 2016), production pace (Moore et al., 2010), the added value induced by the purchase of these products (Fiano et al., 2022), and the way in which these retailers use specific retail marketing mix levers (Kovac et al., 2021) to attract consumers. This paper aims to analyze how Generation Z and Generation Y (Millennials) consumers relate to the two types of strategies, as well as how the marketing mix levers contribute to generating their shopping experience and purchase intention.

In order to achieve the research objective, quantitative research was conducted using a questionnaire as a data collection tool, which was administered online. Of the more than 200 respondents approached, only 147 questionnaires could be retained for analysis. Once collected, the data was systematized and analyzed using SPSS software. At the same time, various working hypotheses were investigated, referring to the respondents' receptivity to fast versus luxury fashion items, the influence of price on the choice of clothes, or the impact of exclusive content and visual storytelling on the decision to purchase clothing items (fast versus luxury).

The novelty of this research stems from the comparative analysis of how Romanian consumers perceive specific retail strategies for fast fashion versus luxury fashion, in a constantly changing socio-economic and cultural context. Although international literature extensively addresses these segments of the fashion industry, studies conducted in Romania remain limited, especially about the ambivalent behavior of younger generations, who oscillate between affordable purchases and a preference for exclusivity. The paper expands on generational theory, which argues that groups of people born in similar time periods share similar experiences, behaviors, and approaches to everyday life, their current behavior being influenced by common historical, economic, political, technological, and socio-cultural events (Dabija et al., 2022).

Literature review

Retail

The fundamental objective of retail activity is to channel the supply of products and services towards the aggregate satisfaction of final demand. Through this function, retail plays a crucial role in optimizing the logistical and informational flow between the manufacturer/distributor and the end user (Tan et al., 2025). To encourage consumers to buy products and/or brands from their own stores, retailers have several specific levers at their disposal, such as assortment policy, private label policy, pricing policy, communication policy, store layout or in-store management policy, location policy, customer service policy, and loyalty policy (Oh et al., 2024). These strategic levers allow retailers to generate consumer experience, satisfy them, and/or build their loyalty. Retail

marketing policies create a comprehensive framework for the strategic orchestration of value in the complex ecosystem of retail (Htwe, 2020).

Today, retail trade is characterized by globalization, internationalization, and concentration. As a result, retailers must continuously improve their business by introducing innovations if they want to survive in highly competitive markets and satisfy their customers, whose demands are constantly changing (Terblanche, 2017). Shopping in modern retail is an experience that includes providing a pleasant atmosphere, a recognizable visual identity, interactive content, and a carefully designed product assortment (Kovac et al., 2021). Performance management in retail is centered on the methodical operation of a set of operational and market levers that are essential for achieving the desired competitive positioning. These are the controllable variables that, when optimally adjusted, generate multiplier effects on consumer experience and loyalty (Metcalfe, 2023).

Fashion Retail

Fashion is a constantly changing system, defined not only by clothing, but also by attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles, which are influenced by economic, political, technological, and cultural factors. It should be understood as a cultural and symbolic process in which clothing becomes an extension of the self, in a social environment where visibility, image, and performance become essential for the validation of personal and collective identity (Svendsen, 2022). It serves not only as a means of covering physical needs, but also as a tool for self-definition and exploration of personal or collective identity. Fashion is a globalized and industrialized sector that encompasses a wide range of economic activities, from clothing design and production to marketing and retail (Cheang et al., 2021). In this sense, fashion is not only an aesthetic phenomenon, but also a driver of the global economy, with a significant impact on labor, the environment, and social norms.

Global fashion is strongly influenced by four major industry hubs: Paris, considered the fashion capital of the world and home to famous fashion houses such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Dior (Pouillard, 2020), a symbol of elegance and refinement and host to one of the most prestigious Fashion Weeks; Milan, known for its sophisticated style for renowned Italian brands such as Gucci, Prada, and Dolce & Gabbana (Choi et al., 2021), and for its status as an iconic luxury shopping destination; New York, a vibrant and diverse city where creative energy and multicultural influences are reflected in the presence of top American brands such as Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein (McLennan, 2021) and in the organization of one of the most important international fashion events, and London, a place where tradition meets innovation, renowned for the nonconformist creativity showcased during Fashion Week and for iconic brands such as Burberry and Alexander McQueen (Steele, 2019).

The fashion industry is divided into two main segments that adopt different marketing strategies tailored to the distinct profile of consumers: fast fashion and luxury fashion. Consumer perception of the marketing mix (the 4Ps: product, price, promotion, placement) varies considerably between the two types of brands. The four luxury cities in the fashion world are Paris, Milan, New York, and London. They are recognized for their importance in the fashion industry and for hosting internationally renowned events such as fashion weeks and collections by the most prestigious designers (Baxter-Wright, 2021).

In the contemporary context of luxury consumption, brand personality transcends mere aesthetics, becoming an essential tool through which individuals express their identity and personal values; the congruence between the perceived personality of the brand and that of the consumer significantly influences brand attachment, being structured on five fundamental dimensions (Donvito et al., 2020): prestige, emotion, trust, anxiety, and order. This structure highlights how luxury brands not only reflect but also shape individual perceptions, providing consumers with a symbolic framework through which

to assert their identity and establish deep emotional connections with the brand (Donvito et al., 2020).

Product quality is responsible for successfully meeting consumer needs and requirements, which change over time. Product functionality is closely related to its design. It is worth noting that the appearance of the store has a significant impact on the image in the fashion retail industry. The appearance of the store must be targeted at the target market (Wen et al., 2022). On a large scale, the factors that influence the ambience are visual communication, i.e., page photos, visible panels, appropriate logo size, etc. Here, the sense of smell should also be considered, as this sense profoundly affects customers' sensations, such as feelings of happiness, hunger, admiration, etc. Setting the right price is essential for the profitability of a business; this requires a detailed analysis of the internal and external factors that influence pricing policy. When considering internal factors, attention should be paid to costs, profit targets, and potential growth. External factors that influence pricing are legislation, technology, competition, market changes, and customers (Wang, 2024). The location of a commercial company is where this company connects the factors of production to achieve its objectives. Choosing a store location is a two-tiered process: macro-location and micro-location (Kovac et al., 2021).

The competition between luxury and fast fashion brands has been largely driven by social media; over the past decade, most of the world's top fashion brands have adopted social media as their primary marketing tool. Fashion professionals now have a clear understanding of what social media can do for their businesses and have therefore implemented many marketing strategies to communicate effectively with their consumers and improve brand performance (Manneh, 2017). These brands post informative and entertaining branded content on social media platforms to showcase their identity, story, collections, style, and other marketing communication messages to connect with existing and potential customers. Among the various social media platforms, marketers consider Instagram to be the most effective channel for fashion brands. Instagram's strong visual component is perfectly suited to fashion businesses (Vinerean and Opreana, 2019). A recent report showed that 98% of fashion brands already use Instagram (Yoo, 2023). This is hardly surprising, given that fashion brands rely heavily on visual elements such as photos of models and products that showcase appealing images (Yoo, 2023). Therefore, today's top brands in the fashion industry, including fast fashion brands and high-end luxury brands, have heavily used this visually oriented social media platform for their marketing communication activities. The reasons for luxury brands are related to consumers' need to use them as symbols of social status and power (Zennaro et al., 2022), while the reasons for fast-fashion brands are often related to "buy it now because it won't be here tomorrow" (Amatulli, 2021; Yoo, 2023).

When developing their strategy for approaching target markets, fashion retailers can use various specific techniques to enhance their brands' image, increase their appeal, and make them more easily and quickly accepted by customers (Wang, 2024): brand storytelling; exclusivity; influencers; digital marketing; emotional connections. Social media campaigns, collaborations with influencers, and fashion shows as narrative platforms can be used to complete the story of a successful brand. Companies in the luxury fashion industry can generate consumer enthusiasm by launching limited edition collections, collaborating with designers and artists, and hosting special, exclusive events (Thilina, 2021). Influencers are essential for promoting cutting-edge fashion brands. Brands can collaborate with powerful figures in the fashion world to promote their products and reach a larger audience. Luxury fashion marketing also frequently uses celebrity endorsements and partnerships with designers and artists to enhance the brand image. With the rise of e-commerce, companies in the luxury fashion industry can use digital marketing to connect with their target market, appealing to their hopes, desires, and emotions, and build emotional connections with their customers. They can evoke feelings and leave a mark through visual storytelling, music, and art (Aporcaritei,2023).

Fast Fashion versus luxury fashion

The fast fashion industry, which has experienced significant expansion since the 1980s, has been based on a business model of rapidly copying new trends at low cost, resulting in an extremely short life cycle for clothing products, supported by outsourcing production to manufacturing conditions with minimal marginal costs (Herold and Prokop, 2023). Fast fashion regularly introduces new products to buy: between 2000 and 2011, the average number of collections produced annually by European clothing companies increased from two to five, with Zara, for example, launching 24 new clothing collections each year, and H&M between 12 and 16. As a result, consumers increasingly view inexpensive clothing items as perishable, "almost disposable" products, which increases the impulse to buy and, consequently, the generation of waste (Centobelli, 2022).

Fast fashion brands instigate consumers to develop a sense of urgency, making them believe that missing out on the opportunity to buy may lead to the item becoming unavailable, thus increasing sales (Gupta and Gentry, 2016). In addition, they are considered by many to be clothing brands that do not invest in advertising. They pay close attention to the location of their stores (Gonda et al., 2020). In contrast, luxury brands also have duty-free shops and specialty stores in many international airports (Pinder and Roberts, 2022). These stores are not only important showcases for brand exposure, but also contribute significantly to the brand's sales revenue (Wang, 2024). However, there are also commonalities: both segments use digital channels, are active on social media, collaborate with influencers, and build communities around the values they promote. This "common ground" raises questions about the real differences in consumer perception, especially in an online environment where the boundaries between fast and luxury can become blurred (Wu, Martinez, and Martin, 2020).

Collaborations with fast fashion brands are a successful strategy for them if done under the right conditions. Collaborations are perceived positively by consumers, increasing the overall awareness of luxury fashion brands by strengthening the presence of luxury brands in the minds of consumers. Luxury consumers will continue to buy from these luxury brands because their perceptions are not negatively affected by co-branding collaborations between luxury and fast fashion brands. The high-end brand will have access to mass consumerism in a way that was not possible before. Shared advertising will help ensure extensive market coverage and, in addition, provide publicity for branding collaborations as well as rapid consumer response. Despite this, true luxury and prestige brands continue to represent the highest form of heritage and craftsmanship and therefore remain consistent. Loyal luxury consumers will not be influenced by certain trends, so the core values of the brand are not compromised (Goncalves et al., 2021). Luxury fashion brands should not fully embrace the fast fashion model, as this could conflict with the traditional idea of what truly identifies and differentiates luxury itself. Rather, luxury fashion brands must remain innovative and avant-garde. Fast fashion has become increasingly important in determining the strategies of global luxury brands. Even though fast fashion brands focus their attention on mass markets, they are no longer considered mass brands, being positioned side by side with luxury fashion brands in the consumer's mind. It is worth noting that co-branding is a relevant strategic means of strengthening and revitalizing a luxury fashion brand. However, the luxury brands that have decided to enter into co-branding collaborations are not traditional fashion houses such as Channel, Balenciaga, Hermes, or Alexander McQueen, but newer, less established brands with a contemporary and fresh profile. These recent luxury brands, with their fashionable and elegant designs, are fashion-conscious and newcomers to the luxury scene, so they need more visibility to achieve higher international recognition (Aporcaritei, 2023).

Luxury fashion represents the market segment dedicated to high-quality, rare goods with exceptional symbolic value, whose main purpose is not to satisfy a utilitarian need, but to signal social status, cultural capital, and membership in an elite. Unlike mass-market products, their value is primarily determined by exclusivity and historical narrative (savoir-faire) (Pouillard and Senecal, 2024).

Luxury fashion is distinguished primarily by controlled scarcity, as production is deliberately kept low to ensure that only a few can afford these items, thus serving as a clear signal of social status. This scarcity is supported by very high material and workmanship quality, resulting from the use of the best materials and traditional craft techniques. Another essential feature is the high symbolic value of the product, which far exceeds its practical usefulness, transforming the garment into a tool for communicating wealth and good taste. In addition, luxury items are based on a powerful story linked to the history of the brand, which allows them to maintain high prices, justified by their brand image, not just the actual cost of manufacture (Colombi and Goretti, 2023).

Luxury and fast fashion are inherently completely different and, in general, should not be pitted against each other. Fast fashion guarantees constant turnover, low prices, and affordable variety, while luxury fashion evokes rarity, heritage, craftsmanship, exclusivity, premium prices, and superior quality (Kim, 2020). However, fast fashion brands have become competitors to luxury brands with their ability to quickly imitate the latest runway offerings. For luxury brands, fast fashion brands now pose a perceived threat due to their limited-edition products, celebrity endorsements, intense advertising spending, store openings in state-of-the-art retail locations, and other aggressive marketing techniques (Amatulli, 2021).

Fast fashion is a business model geared towards the accelerated production of low-priced clothing items, using materials and processes with low sustainability, which encourages an intense consumption cycle and frequent replacement of clothing to respond to fleeting market trends (Bonelli et al., 2024). This model is inherently unsustainable as it promotes a culture of excessive consumption and waste (Daukantienė, 2023). Luxury brands, on the other hand, have traditionally focused on producing high-quality, long-lasting products (Franco et al., 2020). However, luxury brands have been criticized for their unsustainable practices, such as the use of exotic animal skins and furs, and their emphasis on conspicuous consumption (Ramchandani and Coste-Maniere, 2016). Luxury brands have been carefully created through meticulous marketing and brand-building strategies, leaving their mark on the consumer's subconscious and having the following main characteristics: brand power, differentiation, exclusivity, innovation, craftsmanship and precision, premium prices, and high quality (Daukantienė, 2023). Luxury and fashion are not the same thing; they can coexist, but this is not always the case. Until the 19th century, only the very privileged few could afford to keep up with changing trends. So only those who could bear the cost of luxury could afford to create and follow fashion. However, the 21st-century consumer does not have to be wealthy to be fashionable. For example, streetwear brands produced by H&M and Zara are fashionable and affordable, and in a way, what defines luxury brands are the creators rather than the consumers (Morenco, 2020). A luxury product can thus be far from perfect. This means that it is difficult to sell premium products as luxury goods—a phenomenon known as "premium betting" or "trading up" (Som and Blanckaert, 2015; Aporcaritei, 2023).

Methodology

Research design

The research aimed to analyze how the marketing mix levers contribute to creating the shopping experience and shaping the intention to purchase clothing items in the fast fashion and luxury segments, while examining three hypotheses: "Generation Z is more receptive to fast fashion marketing than to luxury marketing"; "Perception of price is a determining factor in brand choice, especially in the fast fashion segment"; and "Luxury fashion brands manage to generate a significant impact through exclusive content and visual storytelling."

The responses of a representative sample of 147 correspondents were analyzed in terms of consumer preferences, price importance, visual influence, and brand behavior. The questions were constructed using a Likert scale from 1 to 5, which allowed for rigorous statistical analyses, such as the t-test, Pearson's correlation analysis, and comparisons of means across the two generations considered. The population studied was represented by respondents, with no age limit, who shop for clothes. To identify the degree of satisfaction, motivations, and factors for clothing purchases, respondents expressed their agreement on aspects such as: where and how often they buy clothes the pleasure they feel when buying clothes from fast fashion and luxury fashion stores; identifying perceptions of prices, discounts, and sustainability of fast and luxury fashion stores; socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (gender, age, income, and frequency of purchase).

The research, conducted in April-May 2025 through an online questionnaire, was promoted on various social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, X, etc., as well as on WhatsApp groups dedicated to fashion and/or clothing purchases. After the actual analyses were carried out, the integrity of the questionnaires was verified, correcting or eliminating responses that could have affected the quality of the data. Examples include incomplete or missing answers, contradictory answers between related questions, repetitive and uniform answers (such as "5" for all variables considered) that indicated careless completion or lack of attention on the part of the respondent, as well as aberrant or impossible values reported in the numerical variables. All variables were subsequently coded and entered SPSS statistical analysis software, version 29 (George & Mallery, 2024), to enable quantitative analyses to be performed. To verify the hypotheses and achieve the objectives, a series of multivariate analyses were performed: correlations, mean tests, regressions.

Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

The initial sample size was approximately 200 people who had purchased fast or luxury fashion items in the last 12 months. Due to incomplete responses, only 147 questionnaires could be retained for analysis, broken down by gender, age, education, and occupation, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical analysis of the respondent profile

Categories	Consumers	Absolute frequency (number of respondents)	Relative frequency (%)
Gender	Feminine Masculine I'd rather not say	107 37 3	72.8 25.2 2
Generation	Generation Z Generation Y	61 86	41.5 58.5
Income	Under 2.500 RON 2.501-4.500 RON 4.501-7.000 RON Above 7.001 RON	18 73 41 15	12.2 49.6 27.9 10.2
Frequency of purchase	Weekly Several times a month Once a month Every 2-3 months	13 50 50 19 15	8.8 34 34 12.9 10.2

(Source: Author's research)

The sample consisted of 107 women, representing 72.8% of the total, due to the predominant research topic. It is noteworthy that there were relatively few men who purchase fast or luxury fashion items (37 people), while three respondents remained anonymous about their gender. To investigate purchasing behavior in the fast fashion industry, the questionnaire focused on the demographic segments that show the greatest dynamics in relation to this consumption model. We considered a theoretical justification for the decision to focus on Generations Y and Z, along with a fine segmentation based on purchasing power, to be essential. Currently, market dynamics are dictated by two generations. Young people in Generation Y (Millennials) are at a point of equilibrium, wanting to be fashionable but still budget-conscious, which makes them key consumers of the current offering. At the same time, Generation Z is defined by the speed with which they adopt new things (short-lived trends) and their dependence on the digital environment to discover these products, being the main drivers of demand based on rapid change.

To understand how financial resources modulate this attitude towards fast fashion and luxury fashion clothing, respondents were divided into four distinct groups, based on the national wage threshold: those with very limited incomes (below the minimum wage), those between the minimum and average wage, the group with average incomes, and those with incomes significantly above average (double the average wage and above). This analysis matrix, which overlaps generation with purchasing power, allows us to identify not only who buys fast fashion or luxury fashion, but also how they can afford this type of consumption.

Results and discussion

Analysis of Purchasing Preferences

The retail marketing mix is a strategic set of controllable variables that a company manipulates to achieve sales and customer satisfaction goals; The extended 8P model provides an analytical lens for evaluating both the material aspects of the offer and the relational and experiential components of the service, allowing for a deep understanding of the reasons behind different consumption patterns.

Table 2: Analysis of questions on all concepts considered

Nr.	Statement (The question)	Measured Concept	Why (Justification)
1	I frequently buy clothes from fast fashion brands.	Buying Behavior	Describes the consumer's direct action/habit, not a company marketing lever.
2	I frequently buy clothes from luxury fashion brands.	Buying Behavior	Describes the consumer's direct action/habit, not a company marketing lever.
3	I frequently buy clothes from second-hand stores, local shops, handmade, etc.	Buying Behavior	Describes the consumer's direct action/habit (preference for alternative channels).
4	I follow fast fashion brands very often.	Buying Behavior	Describes the level of consumer engagement and interest.
5	I follow luxury fashion brands very often.	Buying Behavior	Describes the level of consumer engagement and interest.
6	Fast fashion products are trendy but less durable.	Product	Refers to intrinsic attributes of the sold good: design, quality, durability.

7	Luxury brands offer superior quality products with exclusive designs.	Product	Refers to intrinsic attributes of the sold good: quality and exclusivity (core characteristics of the offering).
8	Price is an essential factor when choosing fast fashion brands.	Price	Refers to monetary value and its importance in the purchase decision (pricing policy).
9	The high price of luxury brands is justified by quality and status.	Price	Refers to pricing strategy and the perception of value offered in return.
10	Fast fashion stores are accessible and easy to find.	Place	Refers to location (physical place) and ease of access to the product/store.
11	Luxury stores offer a refined shopping experience.	Physical Evidence	Refers to the atmosphere, ambiance, and environment (physical space) that supports the luxury experience.
12	I am influenced by promotions and discounts in fast fashion.	Promotion	Refers to communication and sales stimulation tools (discounts, promotions).
13	Advertising of fast fashion brands is frequent on social media.	Promotion	Refers to communication channels used to reach the customer (advertising, social media).
14	Staff in luxury stores are better trained than in fast fashion stores.	People	Refers to the quality, knowledge, and attitude of staff interacting with customers.
15	The purchase process is more efficient and faster in fast fashion.	Processes	Refers to systems and procedures used to deliver the product/service (speed, transaction efficiency).
16	Packaging and presentation matter more in luxury fashion.	Physical Evidence	Refers to visible, tangible elements that complement the product (packaging, display).
17	I identify with the values promoted by luxury brands.	Positioning	Refers to how the brand differentiates itself and anchors in the consumer's mind through values and status.
18	I prefer to buy from brands that communicate sustainability, whether fast or luxury.	Positioning	Refers to brand differentiation strategy based on ethical and environmental values (market positioning).

(Source: Author's research)

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: Identification Levers with Promoted Values

The main purpose of this multiple linear regression application was to determine which elements of the marketing mix and which demographic variables (Gender and Generation) act as predictors for consumer attitude, defined by the dependent variable: I identify with the values promoted.

The model included all 17 other items in the questionnaire as potential predictors, as well as the group variables Gender and Generation (Y/Z). By examining the standardized Beta coefficients, we can determine the strength and direction of each influence on identification with brand values.

Table 3: Leverage analysis

Rang	Leverage (Predictor)	Coef. Std. (β)	Value p	Targeted Concept	Observation
1.	I buy luxury fashion clothes often (Q2)	+0.325	<.001	(Process/Frequency)	The most powerful lever, behavioral effect.
2.	Packaging and presentation matter more in LF (Q16)	+0.236	20	(Physical Evidence)	Emphasis on tangibility and experience.
3.	Gender (male) (Cod 2)	+0.180	38	Demographic	Distinct demographic influence.
4.	I buy secondhand clothes, shop at local stores, etc. often (Q3)	+0.142	40	(Placement)	Leverage related to ethical/alternative choices.

(Source: Author's research)

The most dominant lever is the frequency of purchasing luxury fashion brands, which establishes a mutually reinforcing relationship: identification with values is validated and amplified directly through purchasing behavior. This suggests that, for consumers, simply agreeing with values is insufficient; they must be externalized and demonstrated through repeated purchasing actions.

The importance given to packaging and presentation in luxury fashion, referred to as physical proof, is the second most powerful lever. Although much of the promotion and placement is done digitally, tangible factors remain crucial in reinforcing the perception of exclusivity and trust.

Gender plays a significant role: men identify more with the values promoted, suggesting that luxury is perceived more strongly as status and investment among male consumers. The leverage related to purchasing from alternative sources shows that identification with brand values also includes a strong component of sustainability and ethics, which means that a consumer can identify either with classic luxury or with conscious alternative choices.

It is essential to note that generation (Y/Z), price, and social media following did not have a statistically significant influence. This indicates that consumers' identification with brand values is guided more by symbolic and behavioral factors than by cost considerations or passive exposure on social media.

Analysis of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Young audiences (Generation Z) are more receptive to fast fashion marketing than to luxury marketing.

In the digital age, young consumers are constantly exposed to an avalanche of information, images, and commercial messages. Generation Z represents a market segment that is highly receptive to trends and has a clear preference for digital interaction. Fast fashion, with its business model based on speed, accessibility, and constant adaptation to trends, aligns perfectly with the consumption behavior of this audience (Vajkai and Zsoka, 2020). Brands such as Zara, H&M, and Bershka launch new collections every few weeks (Xie and Yang, 2023), maintaining consumer interest and generating constant pressure on the purchasing cycle. In contrast, the marketing of luxury brands such as Gucci, Prada, and Dior is built on exclusivity, rarity, and sophisticated aesthetics. (Aporcaritei, 2023). The target audience is treated not as a mass, but as a select elite (Chen et al., 2025). Communication strategies are often refined, using elaborate storytelling and campaigns that emphasize brand heritage, product quality, and prestige (Kim, 2020). Thus, young people may perceive this type of marketing as inaccessible. Therefore, the hypothesis investigates the extent to which young audiences are more receptive to fast fashion marketing than to luxury marketing. In the context of the questionnaire, the relevant questions are: how often do respondents follow fast fashion brands and how often do they follow luxury fashion brands. A paired samples t-test will be used to compare the means of these two responses among Generation Z respondents.

Table 4: Comparison of the average receptivity to fast fashion and luxury fashion marketing among young people (Generation Z)

	Mean	Sig.
I follow fast fashion brands very often & Age	1.000	0.059
I follow luxury fashion brands very often & Age	1.014	0.230

(Source: Author's research)

Despite theoretical expectations and general observations regarding young consumer behavior, statistical analysis based on the questionnaire did not indicate a significant difference between receptivity to fast fashion brands and luxury brands. Responses to questions did not show significant variation, and average values were at similar levels. This rejection of the hypothesis can be interpreted in several ways. First, it is possible that young audiences are also showing increased interest in luxury brands, especially through social media, where luxury brands have refined their presence in recent years (Morenco, 2020). Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have democratized access to luxury aesthetics, and impressive visual campaigns, collaborations with celebrities, or niche influencers have managed to increase the appeal of these brands among young people, even if they cannot always purchase the products in question (Thilina, 2021). At the same time, the perception of luxury brands can be influenced by aspirational status, which makes their marketing effective not through frequency, but through emotional and symbolic intensity (Donvito et al., 2020). Thus, young people may follow these brands not for immediate purchases, but for inspiration, style, personal aspiration, or the desire to belong to a cultural elite (Svendsen, 2022). The fact that the hypothesis is not confirmed also highlights an emerging phenomenon: a possible change in the behavior of the younger generation, which is beginning to appreciate brands that offer experiences, stories, and identity, not just affordable and rapidly changeable products. In addition, the increased interest in sustainability, minimalism, and authenticity is leading to a reassessment of how young people view fast fashion brands, even if they are more accessible (Bonelli et al., 2024). Therefore, although the hypothesis was not supported by the data analyzed, this finding is valuable in itself because it signals a shift in youth consumption trends: greater openness to diversity, balanced receptivity to different forms of marketing, and a potential maturing of brand preferences.

Hypothesis 2: Price perception significantly influences brand choice, especially in the fast fashion segment.

Price is a key factor in purchasing behavior, especially among young consumers, who often have limited incomes (Grębowiec and Pietrzak, 2023). They are more attentive to value for money and are influenced by promotions, discounts, or special offers. The fast fashion segment has capitalized on this reality by promoting modern and affordable clothing, produced quickly and available in large quantities (Chen et al., 2025). The pricing strategies of fast fashion brands are often transparent and straightforward, relying on attracting consumers through low prices and frequent new collections (Taylor et al., 2023). Within this hypothesis, we are interested in how price perception influences purchasing behavior, particularly in the context of fast fashion. This aspect is assessed in the questionnaire by the statement "Price is an essential factor in choosing fast fashion brands," which was correlated with "I buy clothes from fast fashion brands often" using a Pearson analysis to see if there is a significant association between price perception and purchase frequency. This analysis provides an in-depth understanding of the motivations that drive consumer choices and can guide brand positioning strategies. For fast fashion, the focus on affordability and diversity remains central.

Table 5: Correlation between price perception and choice of fast fashion brands

	Sig.
I buy clothes from fast fashion brands often	<0.001
Price is an essential factor in choosing fast fashion brands	<0.001

(Source: Author's research)

Analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire, using a Pearson correlation between the statement "Price is an essential factor in choosing fast fashion brands" and "I buy clothes from fast fashion brands often" revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship. In other words, respondents who placed a high importance on price also reported a higher frequency of fast fashion purchases. This finding validates the hypothesis that price perception significantly influences brand choice, especially in the case of affordable fashion. The confirmation of this hypothesis is logical and supported by the economic and behavioral realities of young audiences. In the context of inflation, financial uncertainty, and an active lifestyle, where new clothing needs constantly arise, price becomes an essential factor (Etuk et al., 2022). Young people, especially those with low or medium incomes, are sensitive to costs and prefer products that offer a compromise between aesthetics, trends, and affordability (Morenco, 2020). Fast fashion delivers exactly this package: attractive clothes, quickly produced, easy to obtain, and frequently promoted on social media. This influence of price is further enhanced by the aggressive strategy of fast fashion brands: frequent discounts, "2 for 1" offers, low-priced capsule collections, which create a sense of urgency among shoppers The results of this analysis reinforce the idea that fast fashion brands must continue to communicate clearly and convincingly the prices, promotions, and perceived value of their products. They offer clear direction in market segmentation: for budget-oriented consumers, marketing must highlight financial advantages, while luxury brands must focus on justifying price through storytelling, quality, and status.

Hypothesis 3: Luxury fashion brands create a stronger impact through exclusive content and visual storytelling.

Price is a key factor in purchasing behavior, especially among young consumers, who often have limited incomes (Grębowiec and Pietrzak, 2023). They are more attentive to value for money and are influenced by promotions, discounts, or special offers. The fast fashion segment has capitalized on this reality by promoting modern and affordable clothing that is produced quickly and available in large quantities. Within this hypothesis, we are interested in how price perception influences purchasing behavior, especially in the

context of fast fashion. In the questionnaire, question 8 ("Price is an essential factor in choosing fast fashion brands") directly assesses this aspect. This will be correlated with question 1 ("I buy clothes from fast fashion brands often") using a Pearson analysis to see if there is a significant association between price perception and purchase frequency. In addition, the influence of income level (question 21) on this relationship can be analyzed by segmenting the sample into income categories. It is expected that respondents with low or medium incomes will place greater importance on price and buy more frequently from fast fashion brands, confirming the hypothesis. This analysis provides an in-depth understanding of the motivations that drive consumer choices and can guide brand positioning strategies. For fast fashion, the focus on affordability and diversity remains central. For luxury brands, communicating added value, such as sustainability, quality, or status, is essential to justify high prices and maintain consumer loyalty.

Table 6: Assessment of the impact of visual and narrative communication in luxury fashion brands

	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Luxury brands offer high-quality products and exclusive designs	0.304	<.001
I buy clothes from luxury fashion brands		

(Source: Author's research)

Analysis of the data collected through the questions "Luxury brands offer superior quality products and exclusive designs" and "Packaging and presentation matter more in luxury fashion" showed a high average level of agreement among respondents, positively correlated with question 5 ("I follow luxury fashion brands very often"). The values obtained through SPSS analysis (Pearson correlation or t-test, depending on the formulation) indicate that the public perceives luxury brands as influential precisely because of the way they communicate their visual identity and exclusivity. Confirmation of this hypothesis underscores the fact that visual storytelling, through image campaigns, refined packaging, and collaborations with renowned artists or designers, plays an essential role in the communication strategy of luxury brands (Wu, Martinez, and Martin, 2020). Unlike fast fashion, which relies on volume, speed, and accessibility, luxury brands choose to invest in creations that tell a coherent, emotional story, often inspired by art, history, or profound cultural symbols (Pouillard and Senecal, 2024). This strategy works not only to attract customers, but also to retain them. The psychological impact of visual storytelling is significant: it creates an aspirational universe, gives meaning to the product, and makes the act of purchasing perceived as a form of participation in an aesthetic ritual (Yang et al., 2023). Furthermore, in the age of social media, this type of exclusive content is extremely valuable: it is shared, commented on, and reinterpreted, which contributes to increasing the prestige and notoriety of the brand.

Conclusions

The paper makes a substantial contribution to the field of fashion retail marketing by providing a differentiated analysis of how the marketing mix influences consumer perception and behavior in the fast fashion and luxury fashion segments. The study demonstrates that, in the current context, the differences between these two segments are no longer just economic or related to purchase frequency, but are deeply linked to consumer experience, visual narrative, and the values conveyed by the brand. While fast fashion capitalizes on accessibility, rapid diversity, and low prices, luxury fashion manages to build a distinct identity through superior quality, rarity, and sophisticated storytelling. The validation of the hypothesis regarding the impact of visual content and narrative in luxury fashion confirms that consumers' identification with brand values depends more on tangible experience and behavioral loyalty than on generational factors or simple exposure to communication. This finding makes a significant theoretical

contribution, highlighting the need to integrate emotional and symbolic elements into conceptual models of luxury marketing, thus complementing the existing literature on perception differences between fashion segments.

The results provide distinct strategic directions for reconfiguring the marketing mix. For fast fashion brands, the strategy should remain focused on transparent communication of prices and promotions, capitalizing on the cost sensitivity of the audience. In contrast, for luxury fashion, brand management should focus on strengthening behavioral loyalty (repeat purchases) and the tangible product experience. Regression analysis identified packaging and presentation (physical evidence) as the second most powerful lever, crucial for validating the perception of exclusivity. A differentiation of messages for the male audience is necessary, as men identify significantly more with the values promoted by luxury, perceiving the purchase as a status and an investment.

Although the paper offers valuable insights, it also has important limitations that must be acknowledged. The small sample size and its exclusive focus on Romania limit the transferability of the conclusions to a global level, as cultural, economic, and social contexts can significantly influence perceptions of fashion brands. The convenience sampling method introduces a degree of subjectivity and may affect the representativeness of the results. The questionnaire was not administered separately to self-identified fast fashion versus luxury fashion shoppers, which limits the ability to identify detailed differences between the two groups. In addition, the research was based predominantly on quantitative data, which restricts the complex understanding of the emotional and symbolic factors that influence consumer behavior. These limitations provide opportunities for more extensive and nuanced future research.

Based on these limitations, a series of recommendations for future research are formulated. An international comparative study is needed to validate the dynamics of youth consumption in different cultural contexts. A more refined segmentation of respondents based on qualitative variables, such as lifestyle, attitude towards sustainability, or disposable income, is necessary to better understand multifaceted behavior. Another essential direction is to supplement the quantitative study with an in-depth qualitative analysis (interviews or focus groups) to elucidate the emotional and aspirational mechanisms underlying luxury purchases and identification with brand values.

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